

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

No. 173.—THIRD SERIES. SATURDAY, APRIL 23, 1892. PRICE TWOPENCE.

BY RIGHT OF SUCCESSION.

By ESMÈ STUART.

Author of "A Faire Damzell," "Joan Vellacot," "Kestell of Greystone," etc. etc.

CHAPTER LII. AT UNTERBERG AGAIN.

As we have seen, Unterberg was not a town which could in any way be called lively or fashionable. From month to month its life certainly varied as did the seasons. There were fresh soldiers, fresh students with fresh scars after their many duels; but when all was said, the old town always looked much the same to the rare stranger who returned to the quaint place.

Austin had travelled very quickly in order to find out something he wanted to know at Unterberg. He did not waste his time on the Rhine, nor, indeed, did he stop anywhere that was not absolutely necessary; for the winter did not make the country look inviting, and the traveller had no temptation to linger.

Austin thought the German trains unpardonably slow—all the slower because his mind was never at rest. He was deeply grieved at what had happened at home; but what troubled him most was that he could no longer place his mother on the mental pedestal she had always occupied. Was it this horrid money that had made the difference? Money was certainly the root of all evil. Ah, if only they had never come in for James Gordon's money, then his mother would not have made plans about heiresses for him, and would not have entertained such exalted notions about her only son. He might have married Grace without

any remarks as to what was or was not suitable for him.

Then as to this discovery, of course he could not be sure even now that his mother was wrong; but with any doubt in his mind he could not have a share in the spending of it. Mr. Jones had sent him a handsome cheque which would last him some time, and then what Grace said and did would settle his future career.

Unterberg at last was reached one cold winter's evening. Quickly he jumped out of the train, and leaving his port-manteau, he walked hastily through the familiar avenues and streets towards the Professor's house. How happy he had been in that spot, which to most Englishmen would have appeared dull enough! It was there that he had known what is the greatest event of any human life—the finding out that it loves some one beyond itself—some one who stands in the place of the self who has before, even if unconsciously, been alone worshipped.

The house door was shut now, and Austin had to ring, whereupon it was opened to him by the porter who lodged below, and who was a stranger to Austin. He ran quickly up the stairs; he even paused before Frau Hanson's door, hoping he might hear or see Grace coming out; but, thinking better of this conduct, he hurried up the next flight of stairs, rang the bell, and asked if the Professor or his lady were within. Yes, of course, they were never out, and in another moment Austin was receiving a warm welcome. Why had he come? Was he staying in the town, or would he stay with them? His room was not occupied. The real, hearty welcome was quite a pleasure to Austin,

only he was longing to come to the point. At last he said :

"And how are Frau Hanson, Gretchen, and the English ladies?" The Professorin took up this thread at the same time as she took up her grey knitting; she could spin a tale about her neighbours, at all events.

"Frau Hanson is just the same as ever; she has very few ideas, but she is a good woman; she will be very glad to see you, I am sure. Gretchen still talks of the English gentlemen; she has improved very much; indeed, some say she is a very clever child. She talks English like a native. That dear miss was a great blessing to her."

"Does she still learn with Miss Evans?" asked Austin, to get quicker to the point.

"Ach! do you not know? No, how should you? Let me see, it was after you went. You remember the letter you sent me? Why, strange, it was only this morning I was talking of you, because that letter was at hand. When I had read it, I wound a great ball of grey worsted round it, and it was this very morning that I finished the worsted around it, and your letter dropped out. It was because of that worsted that I could not give your letter to Fräulein Grace. Yes, I remember, she said she was sorry; but then it does not matter now, you are more likely to see her now than I am."

"Why?" asked Austin, not understanding all this rigmarole, and yet feeling something was altered.

"Because the two English girls went away quite suddenly—to London, I think. Fräulein Grace was quite excited about it, and Frau Hanson did say——" Austin really heard no more; after all, his haste and rashness were punished. Every hour which he had fancied was taking him nearer to Grace had in truth placed only greater distance between them; and here he was in the depth of winter in a dreary—yes, absolutely dreary—German town, having accepted the kind Professor's invitation to stay with him. What should he do? How should he get out of his bargain? How, indeed! But there was nothing to be done now—nothing but to call himself names, and declare that his evil star was in the ascendant.

However, evidently he managed to put in the right answers, for the Professorin talked on very happily for a long time, and when she was tired the Professor took up the thread of her discourse.

"And how is our young friend, Herr Chones? Does he still read the 'Sorrows of Werther'? Together we never finished it. That was a pity, but perhaps it was happily so; the immortal Goethe would not have admired our young friend's mind." He tapped his forehead as of old, but even this well-remembered trick could not make Austin smile. He was too anxious to hear about Grace. Where had she gone; who knew her address? Gradually the unpleasant idea came to him that he had been a fool to rush off without first writing to find out if Grace were there; and how he would make himself talked about if he absented himself from his sister's wedding, for Austin never doubted that everything would come off as his mother had decided.

Why had he not stayed at home and sifted the matter thoroughly; and, above all, why had he not found out whether Grace was at Unterberg before coming? He found himself obliged to change his tactics and invent an excuse for his coming.

"You are very kind to ask me to stay here, but indeed I am only a bird of passage, and I felt bound to come and pay my Christmas respects to you. However, I must be off to-morrow again, so I will go and see Frau Hanson this evening."

"Do; but you must stay over Christmas. A German Christmas is so hearty."

"I am sorry to say I cannot. My sister is going to be married, and I ought to be present at the ceremony." Which was true enough; so presently Austin walked sadly downstairs, feeling altogether out of tune, and wondering how people could go on living in this dormouse kind of way, which thought, it must be remembered, had not entered his head when he was daily seeing Grace walking about the old German town. He found Frau Hanson near her stove reading a story-book to Gretchen, and it need not be said how surprised they both were, and what genuine pleasure they displayed at his appearance.

"And you can, of course, tell us about Fräulein Grace," said Frau Hanson, almost immediately. "She is in London, and you live near to London, you told us."

London had, in the imagination of these good folk, no greater dimension than Unterberg.

"No, I have not seen the English sisters. I expected you would tell me all the news."

"Fräulein Grace wrote to me once," said Gretchen, "such a nice letter all in English; it took me quite a long time to make it

out, but I did at last. I will show it to you if you like. Wasn't it a pity you didn't give her a ring? See, here is my ring; I wear it every evening and on fête days," and the demure maiden became suddenly eloquent, for her English friends had opened her mind considerably. She seemed now to have a very large circle of friends in spite of their living so far away. Austin eagerly accepted the offer of seeing Grace's letter, and it was at last, after much searching, found in Gretchen's desk.

Austin looked first at the address, 18, Audley Street. How was it Grace was there? What was she doing?

"Is her home in London now?" asked Austin, finding it quite as impossible to draw out any real news, but feeling rich indeed now that he had her address.

"Yes," said Gretchen; "they went away quite suddenly one day, and I do believe, Herr Jones, that the Fräulein is married, and she is shy about it. See what she says and she only ends 'Grace.' I don't know whether to write Frau or Fräulein now."

"Nonsense, Gretchen; she would have told us the news," laughed Frau Hanson; but all the same the idea took possession of Austin's mind. That was it; yes, some old lover had turned up—that friend she spoke of, and she had gone back and was living in Audley Street. This was the letter, and Austin read a great deal between the lines.

"MY DEAR LITTLE GRETCHEN, — We went away so suddenly that I did not say half what I wished to say to you. I wanted to thank you for a great deal of happiness and love—more than you know of, child. Never mind; when you are grown up and are a big girl I will tell you about it, and you shall come and see me in my home. Yes, Gretchen, I have a new home—such a very, very happy one—where I can feel safe from all misfortune; but how I got it would be too long to explain. You shall know that, too, when you are bigger. Sibyl lives with me and with the loved person who has given us this happy home—some one I can never love enough. You will like to hear this, child, and so will your mother and the Professorin. How kind she was when we were in trouble and when my sister was ill. London is a big place—so big and sad for those who are not happy. I never could have expected I should have loved it as I do; indeed, I never expected

to love any place at all again, but I was wrong. God heals old wounds and makes little green twigs to come forth from the old brown bark. You don't know about that yet, Gretchen, but you may some day, and you will then think about your old friend who told you this. Write to me in English, and then I shall still be teaching you a little, and some day you must come and see me in this big, big London.—Your affectionate friend,

"GRACE."

"I think Gretchen is right," said Austin, folding up the letter; "indeed, I feel sure she is. Miss Grace is married." He said it very deliberately, but it seemed to him as if all the lights in God's big world had gone out suddenly. This, of course, explained Grace's conduct; perhaps that mysterious he had once forsaken her, and in her sorrow she had turned towards him—Austin—for comfort. Then most likely the misunderstanding had come right and she had found happiness. What a selfish brute he was not to feel for her joy; but this he found nearly impossible—he could not do it; he had woven plans, such plans for his Grace and himself, and now all his dreams faded away. Life was a great mistake; even his mother had forsaken him, and all the old landmarks seemed cut down.

So it was with a kind of desperate despair that he rose at last and went away, for even forsaken lovers have to go on talking and answering questions; and however unhappy they may be, they have to hide their deepest suffering.

Unterberg reminded him too much of Grace; he now felt only impatient to leave it, and forced himself to go again to the Hansons' and say good-bye. He found them in a great and pleasing excitement. A lodger was coming who would pay well—quite a godsend to the widow; he was a rich artist, and if you gave them little furniture and plenty of room, artists were quite convenient people and especially rich ones. Fräulein Grace was almost forgotten in the excitement, only Gretchen did say:

"If you see Frau Grace, tell her I will come and see the big London; don't forget."

Austin went out once more into the town before starting to the station and bought presents for all the good people who were looking forward to Christmas. For Gretchen Austin purchased a gold chain with a locket to wear round her neck; Grace had loved her, so he thought, and

that was the secret of Gretchen's luck that day. However, one good had come out of all this. He had got Grace's address in Audley Street, even if by going to see her he found that she was no longer Grace Evans.

CHAPTER LIII. THE OTHER GIRLS.

EVERYBODY was more or less out of tune at this time at the Warren. The reason for this, on the outside at least, was merely the ordinary worries of life in a week before a wedding. The dressmakers would not send home the dresses; the bridesmaids were much dissatisfied with their colours—they did not all match; one of them wrote to say she could not wear the shoes selected by the other five, whereupon Minnie declared she wouldn't pair with her—it would spoil the look. The wedding-cake was delayed on the road; and Mrs. Gordon, through one friend, heard that another friend was much hurt at not being invited.

Beatrice tried not to be worried about such minor evils; she hardly went out except alone on the heath, which looked somewhat dreary now, except when flooded by sunshine, and all the while her mind would recur to that journal. It was very foolish of her, of course, since her Colin had said it was all right; but somehow she could not help it. One day she even went down to the cottage where she had first heard of the young ladies, and tried to draw out the woman about them; but by this time the poor woman had heard the truth about them—how they had been "mistakes," as she put it—and felt shy of talking to Miss Gordon about them. Her information did not go further than "Poor things, miss, they was very genteel-looking, all the same." Coming out of the cottage, Beatrice encountered Dr. Smith; she knew him by sight, barely more; but to-day she felt impelled to talk to him. Surely he must be the very man mentioned in that diary. Their road lay the same way; he was taking a short cut across the heath to a distant part of the parish. Naturally, he would merely have bowed and passed on, for he felt somewhat shy of these grand Miss Gordons, and always jealous for his own favourites; but to-day Beatrice would not let him pass on.

"You visit Mrs. Dance, I think, Dr. Smith," she began, shyly; "how do you think she is now?"

"She will never be any better, I fear,"

said the Doctor, his face relaxing in a look of sympathy; "that terrible rheumatic fever has left permanent mischief; she may live for years, but she will become more crippled every day. Heaven grant she may die before that happens, however."

"The sufferings of poor people always seem to me rather mysterious, I think; only sometimes the rich have more mental pain. I mean," she added, blushing very much now, "Mrs. Dance was talking about—Mr. James Gordon's daughters; you knew them, of course?" The Rubicon was passed now, and though Dr. Smith looked with surprise at Miss Gordon, it was with no unkind surprise.

"Yes, I knew them well, of course, from their birth."

"And their mother," added Bee, quickly. "You knew her; you were very kind to her." She was thinking of the journal. Dr. Smith not having this clue, felt decidedly puzzled.

"Yes, she was a very, very remarkable woman, poor thing. I conclude, Miss Gordon, you know—of course you do—what was said of her. For my part, I never could add a word of blame to what is already said; and though I do not doubt the fact, yet there must have been some mystery about her, which no one has yet discovered."

"Suppose," said Bee, earnestly, forgetting her mother's warning—even what Colin thought—"suppose she had married, Dr. Smith, and that for some reason James Gordon would not let her own herself his wife; suppose he had done such a very wicked thing, do you imagine that would account for the mystery?"

"Yes, certainly it would; but then how about afterwards? She died very soon and so young; and the girls grew up with James Gordon, and he never once alluded to the subject. Your idea is too improbable."

"That is difficult to understand. Yes, I suppose impossible; and yet the poor wife certainly believed this to be the case, so he must have deceived her."

Dr. Smith stood still from sheer surprise. What was Miss Gordon talking of? He had himself sifted the matter with Mr. Blackston; he knew all there was to be known; and yet here was a young girl, a stranger, talking about the mother of Grace and Sibyl as if she had known her.

"I beg your pardon, but you are talking of what you know nothing about," he said, sharply.

This brought Beatrice to her senses. What would her mother say? Instinctively, she knew that her mother meant the subject to be dropped, and yet—she could not drop it. Had not Colin taught her the value of truth? and though he had satisfied her mind for the moment, her doubts all came back as she heard Dr. Smith talking of a mystery. For a moment she weighed her mother's anger and truth in the scales, and then she suddenly decided that, come what might, truth should win the victory. It was a hard struggle, and the former uncertainty had nearly made her ill; she had barely got over that first shock, but here were the doubts coming back with the strength of a returning tide. The words she had read had struck her so forcibly as being true. But Austin had given up the idea and had forsaken her, and Colin was persuaded she was wrong.

"I feel sure, Dr. Smith, you are thinking me very odd, to talk about this subject. I do not know whether I ought to do so, but it will haunt me, even though a few days ago I fancied I was quite satisfied; in spite of everything the words come back again and again. Do you think you would have trusted Mrs. Gordon when she was alive—in ordinary matters, I mean? I don't know how else to put it."

Dr. Smith recollected that his patient had always been of a nervous temperament, and very delicate; but her state of health had accounted for that.

"She was a very interesting woman, and very gentle; as to truth, I can hardly judge, can I? Besides, it is long ago."

"But it sounded so true, every word of it, if you could read it; how she must have run away to be married without asking any one's consent—her aunt had brought her up—and how James Gordon would not let her tell any one; and how she silently suffered. That I am sure was true; she suffered dreadfully. I can't bear to think of it, Dr. Smith, especially now, when everything seems so bright for myself."

The Doctor looked with intense surprise at this young girl who was so much in earnest. He admired the energy of character which could trouble itself about a misfortune now long laid in the grave.

"But what are you alluding to? Where did you read this about this Mrs. Gordon?"

"I found an old journal of hers, but

they all say it is her fancy; only to me it reads like truth. My mother has had the matter thoroughly examined, and went to Mr. Blackston about it. Even Captain Grant is satisfied, and he is so well able to judge."

"I never heard of a journal. I should like to see it if I might. Perhaps I am expressing undue curiosity, Miss Gordon; but I will ask Blackston about it. You are very good to interest yourself so much about this affair."

"I was thinking about those girls, Dr. Smith. Where are they now? Of course you knew them well; I have only lately heard about them."

"Poor children. Your mother was very kind to them, but of course they bitterly felt leaving their home. The blow came upon them so unexpectedly. I offered them a home, but it would not have done, I suppose. My wife said so afterwards. You see, society is hard on its outcasts."

"How they must hate us! Still, I heard mother say that they had left the school where she placed them, and that no one now seems to know where they are. When I am married, Dr. Smith, I mean to find them out."

"I had a letter from Grace, the eldest, when she first went to Germany, but it was a short, sad epistle."

"Grace." Bess repeated the name; it seemed so familiar to her since Austin had talked so much about his Grace Evans.

"And since then?"

"I am ashamed to say I have not answered it. I am a busy man, that must be my excuse; and what could I say? But I will write at once; and, by the way, I will ride round and see Blackston this afternoon about that journal."

They had now reached the end of the path which ended in the road. Dr. Smith was going on beyond, Beatrice was close to home. She was still full of her subject, but the Doctor was in a hurry.

"Was Grace a nice girl?" she asked, as she was shaking hands with him.

"Yes," said the Doctor, quietly; "she was not at all an ordinary character. To-day, Miss Gordon, you have been reminding me of her. After all, there really is a family likeness, though I do not wish to hurt your feelings."

"Why should it? Poor Grace! And the other one?"

"The other was as pretty as possible, but she had not Grace's steadiness of purpose—no harm in her, but too pretty to

be poor. Good-bye, Miss Gordon. Will you allow me to congratulate you? What day is it?"

"Our wedding is on Thursday, and to-day is Tuesday," said Bee, simply. "It is a pity we cannot be married quietly; I do dread all the fuss." Then she blushed and smiled, thinking herself very bold, so that she was glad when she was left alone to think out this conversation. What would her mother say? Should she tell her?

If she had found an opportunity during the day she would have mentioned it, but Mrs. Gordon was in an unusually excitable mood, much inclined to find fault with every one, so Beatrice thought it was wiser to say nothing, but later on in the day she had cause to repent of her silence.

After leaving Beatrice, good Dr. Smith went on his way, his mind filled with many new thoughts; the first and newest was that that Miss Gordon was a very nice girl, though before this he had classed all three together as empty-headed misses. It was strange that she had such a strong belief in the truth of that journal, for the question opened out a curious future story. The Doctor liked her all the better for believing in it, though, at the same time, he felt convinced that she was wrong; still curiosity being at the root of man's character as well as that of the feebler sex, the Doctor determined to ride on and call on Blackston.

The lawyer was at home; he had just come in from his office and was enjoying his wife's small talk.

Dr. Smith made several blunt excuses about his unusual appearance, saying he thought he would "look in," and Mrs. Blackston then became profuse in her enquiries about his wife. It was not difficult to lead the conversation round to the Gordons. A good many persons were talking about the wedding, for Coleham was going to provide the wedding breakfast, the waiters, and the carriages, even the bridesmaids' dresses, as Mrs. Gordon wished to please the little country town. A fashionable marriage rouses such a little world, more than anything else, except, of course, an election.

Indeed, the Doctor was saved the trouble of the plunge by Mrs. Blackston herself saying:

"Are you invited to the wedding? Of course, as family doctor, you are expected."

"I believe the invitation has arrived,

but it is very unlikely that I shall go to the festivity. I barely know the widow, but I met the bride-elect to-day, and I was particularly taken with her."

"Ah, yes, of course," said Mr. Blackston, in the tone of "I know them much better than you do." "Mrs. Gordon was quite lately talking to me a good deal about her daughter. I was drawing up the settlements. The bridegroom was here, too. A very superior man." The lawyer prided himself on knowing superior men by the cut of their coats.

"Not at all the dashing officer, you said, George."

"Did I say so, my dear?"

"Well, I mustn't stay," put in the Doctor at last, causing Mrs. Blackston to say to herself: "Whatever did you come for?" But Mr. Blackston, being a lawyer, and therefore shrewd, followed the Doctor to the door. The Doctor never beat round the bush.

"So the widow came about James Gordon again?"

"The old story. She is afraid of any flaw, but we went over all that before."

"Nothing new, then?"

"No—no, nothing, except that some bit of a journal has turned up. Nothing that would serve for proof. I feel sure there is not. I turned out everything myself."

"Of course; I felt sure of that. You read it, I suppose?"

"No. Mrs. Gordon did not bring it. She said it was purely feminine details."

"Ah! I should think you might ask to see it. To be plain with you, Blackston, being no lawyer"—the Doctor twinkled up his eyes—"the bride-elect met me this afternoon, and I find she is very much impressed with this journal; says that it explains a great deal. The girl found it herself. I believe she has it on her mind. I call it very noble of her, because, of course, if there was by any chance anything which—"

The lawyer smiled.

"A mystery is food and drink to young girls. They make it out of anything. However, I might see it, certainly; but Mrs. Gordon didn't bring it, and I don't feel anxious to worry her about it. She is in every way most honourable; did all she could to sift the matter at first, and even this journal wouldn't be proof. I shouldn't be at all surprised if poor James Gordon's lady fancied she was really married to him."

"She did."

"And that James Gordon wanted to hush it up."

The lawyer was laughing at his own sagacity. The Doctor laughed too.

"Yes, it seems she did. But, of course, it may be pure imagining, only I wish you would ask to see it. That woman interested me very much. She was my patient for a long time; besides, I am thinking much of my poor Grace and Sibyl."

"Ah, poor things! James Gordon was a rascal. We all agree about that."

"So he was. In either case, I fancy he can't get rid of that verdict. Well, good evening. You'll go to-morrow, and just see this journal."

"I will, though it looks as if I were suspicious," said Mr. Blackston, thoughtfully. "Suppose I wait till after the wedding?"

"I should like that girl's mind set at rest. She really believes it all, and half made me believe it."

The lawyer burst out laughing.

"It's your duty and your profession to believe a good deal."

Then, after some more good-natured banter, the two men separated. They both sweetened the labours of their own professions by slightly despising each other's work.

To-day Mr. Blackston was inwardly a little annoyed at the Doctor's persistent fussiness. The settlements were drawn up; Beatrice Gordon's future portion of the Warren estate was neatly tied up for herself and her children, besides having ample settlements from her husband. Moreover, Mr. and Mrs. Blackston had received such cordial notes of invitation to the wedding breakfast, that it was altogether impossible to interfere further in hunting up past facts which were none. Mrs. Gordon would dislike his going to investigate further; but Dr. Smith's tone made him conscious that he must do all he could for "those poor girls." Had the Doctor doubted that he would not do it? The study of motives is a very difficult task; it belongs to a branch of learning called "higher mathematics."

SEALS.

WHAT'S here beside foul weather, an explorer might ask on the verge of the Behring Sea. It would be difficult to suggest any alleviating circumstances connected with that dreary but extensive

stretch of ocean. It seems as if we have there arrived at the very fag end of earth and sea, where all the winter through they brew frothy tempests and furious hurricanes, and where in summer time are stored the fogs, and chills, and cramps, that the rest of the world has done with for a season. When Behring first found a way out of that melancholy sea by the straits that bear his name, doubtless he was buoyed up by the hope of discovering some fairer land and brighter sea beyond those iron gates; but he was only doomed to disappointment. The fair and open Arctic sea that has been the dream and hope of navigators for centuries, has not yet been discovered; we have given up the idea of its existence. It is possible indeed, as Count Nordenskiöld has shown, to sail along the Siberian coast, and so reach the Pacific from the Atlantic by the Behring Strait, but the dangers and hardships of the transit are too great for the route ever to become of commercial value.

Thus, surrounded by barren rocky shores, where a few miserable wandering tribes found a bare subsistence, Samoyedes on the Asiatic side, Esquimaux and Indians on the other, with a mixed Aleutian race of no great physical or moral value, the Behring Sea might for long have been left to its original solitude; was, in fact, so left for many generations after its existence had become generally known, but for one of those provoking discoverers, who are always on the look-out to turn the secrets of Nature to their own advantage. The hero of the story is one Pribilov, a battered Russian sea-dog, who commanded a small craft that traded amongst the Asiatic coasts in summer time for furs and peltries generally. According to the story an old Shaman, or soothsayer, who was living among the Aleuts at Oonalaska, probably under the influence of an overdose of vodka, gave Captain Pribilov a hint of the existence of certain islands where the skins of the seal, obtained on the coast slowly and with difficulty, by hunting and harpooning, might be had in hundreds of thousands for the mere trouble of slaughtering.

That witchcraft and enchantment were powerful enough in those latitudes everybody believed, and there was mystery enough too, for the whole region is often enveloped in impenetrable fogs. The tepid waters of the Pacific, that flow in a gentle current towards the Arctic ocean, steam like the contents of a boiling cauldron under the influence of the frigid atmosphere;

and sometimes in summer, when the fogs are at the worst, whole weeks will elapse during which the mariner sees no further than the bowsprit end.

Braving the real and imaginary dangers of this inhospitable sea, Captain Pribilof set sail in search of the seal islands in 1786, almost ran against them in a fog which lasted for seven or eight days, and finally discovered the biggest of them in an interval of clear daylight. The island had no inhabitants except seals, but with them it swarmed; and the Captain, leaving a few men on the island to keep possession, returned to the mainland to obtain assistance in exploiting his discovery. When the news leaked out among the whaling and sealing adventurers of the period, there was a general rush to these fortunate isles, and, as a matter of course, a general onslaught and slaughter upon the unhappy seals, who had so long enjoyed in peace their favoured breeding grounds.

So keen was the competitive slaughter that in half a century from the first discovery of the Pribilof Islands the fur seal was almost exterminated in those regions, and in 1840 a few hundreds only were left of the vast herds which had formerly resorted to the islands. Then the Russian Government took the matter up, and by judicious regulations the stock of seals resorting to the islands was gradually increased. The adventurous sealers of other nations had ceased to resort to the Behring Sea, which no longer afforded a profitable catch, and the seals, now protected in their breeding quarters, multiplied themselves in geometric progression. Thus, when in 1867 Russia disposed of her possessions on the American shores to the United States Government, a very handsome sealing property was thrown in.

Yet so little was known about the matter that the United States Government were quite unaware of the value of their new possession, and a couple of American speculators, visiting the islands in 1868, found the whole stock of seals virtually at anybody's disposal, and did actually capture and kill an immense number for their own benefit. But anxious to preserve the "goose of the golden egg," and no doubt anticipating an ugly rush from every quarter, these two gentlemen at once formed a Company, and obtained for it a concession of the exclusive right of killing seals on the

islands; and in 1870 Congress gave the effect of law to a series of regulations intended for the protection of the seals. Under these laws the Company was entitled to slaughter each year a limited number of a hundred thousand seals, of the masculine persuasion, for the females are rigidly protected, and as the annual birth-rate is estimated at over a million, it will be seen that there was plenty of margin for the natural increase of the seal population.

Yet the seals have many enemies, and in the first year of its existence the "pup" seal forms a dainty morsel for basking sharks and other monsters of the deep. The popular nomenclature of the seal, by the way, is curious. The males are "bulls," the females "cows," but their offspring are not "calves," but "pups," and puppyish enough is their appearance as they roll about, bleating and frisking on the wet rocks. The "pup," too, is appreciated as food by the native Aleuts, who do all the slaughtering business on the islands, and they are allowed to kill a certain number and salt them down for winter use. Yet with all this infant mortality the number of seals has gone on increasing.

The seal is not a fish, as everybody knows, and it is only by an abuse of language that it can be called amphibious. It is as much a terrestrial animal as a dog or a cat, only it has acquired by long experience the art of swimming and diving to perfection; and its limbs have suffered a sea change in consequence of its habits. Possibly, if any portion of the human race in its earlier stages of development had been driven to an exclusively fish diet, it would have acquired the same habits as the seal, and we might have been in presence of a submarine world, with kingdoms and cities beneath the waves, as shadowed forth in the story of Queen Gulnare in the "Arabian Nights."

But the terrestrial origin of the seal is very strongly and curiously marked, and in effect gives rise to the whole international difficulty between the United States and England at the present moment. If the seal were a thoroughly aquatic animal, it would give birth to its young in the water, and the Pribilof Isles would not be worth anything, nor would anybody value the whole Behring Sea, including the Straits, at very much more. But the seal pup at the time of its birth, and for six weeks or more afterwards, will drown in the water;

it has to learn to swim when it gets old enough; and then it comes to revel, and no wonder, in its newly acquired faculty.

From this physiological fact, it follows that seals are obliged to resort to the land in order to give birth to their young; this causes a yearly migration among the race, which, in the case of those inhabiting the North Pacific, directs itself exclusively upon the two Pribilof Islands in the Behring Sea. It is a general migration of the whole community, from the warmer regions of the south to the cool and moisture-laden air of the favoured region. Beginning in June, this migration continues for nearly a month, and the females heavy with young are the last to arrive.

This migration forms the opportunity of the free or Palasie sealers—those who sail from the western parts of British Columbia—to take a share in what is going. For at this time the Behring Sea and the coasts adjoining are pretty well crowded with these pilgrims of the sea; and in shooting and harpooning there is a good chance of securing a profitable load of skins. Naturally the free fisher takes what comes to hand: he can't discriminate between male and female in the water, nor would he care to do so, perhaps. In this way, no doubt, the prospect of seal increase is damaged. On the other hand the sea is very wide, and the seal, under ordinary circumstances, is tolerably wide awake. Round about the seal islands, again, there is a fine congregation of seals from the middle of June to the middle of August. The cow seals are suckling their young; but they have also to seek their food, and as the assemblage of seals round the island makes fish scarce, as might be expected, the mother seals have far to swim before they reach a satisfactory fishing ground, and are often absent from their nurseries for twenty-four, or even forty-eight hours. If the mother is caught on her travels by a free fishing crew, her offspring, too, must come to an untimely end for want of nourishment. It is also contended that the presence of ships and their crews tends to frighten the seals from their breeding ground; but there does not seem to be much in this, for the seals, though wary enough at other times, seems at this particular time to be almost indifferent to human presence.

On the islands themselves, the killing of the seals required for their skins is conducted in a way to militate as little as possible against their increase. As well as

the family seals who resort to the islands there are great herds of bachelor bulls, ranging from a year old and upwards to seven or eight. From these are chosen the victims of the year's slaughter, and bulls of from three to four years old are selected by the practised Aleuts who conduct the butchery. It is pure butchery, without excitement or danger; the selected herd is driven like a flock of sheep to the slaughter ground, and there knocked on the head. The killing season, which is in July, is selected because at that time the skins of the young bulls are in the finest condition, and to debar the outside or free fishers from catching, at the same time, which would be the effect of enacting a close season, would be in effect to shut them out of the best of the season.

Yet it is evident that if the United States Government did not preserve the seals, there would soon be none left to preserve. Yet to close the Behring Sea altogether is certainly "a large order." It would suggest Great Britain having to close the German Ocean in order to protect the Scotch salmon fisheries. There would be a tolerably close analogy between the two proceedings.

Whatever else may happen, it is to be hoped that the seals will not suffer. It would be charming to hear of a self-denying ordinance by which all nations would agree to cease from their slaughter; for they are such amiable, pleasing creatures, incapable of animosity except in defence of their hearths and homes, and in their habits they reveal many aptitudes for association and mutual sympathy. The hair seal is less gregarious, and altogether more retiring in his habits; but he probably owes these attributes to the constant persecution he has undergone at the hands of man. The sea otter is still more shy, and his fur being the most valuable and beautiful of its kind, he is eagerly chased along the shores of Alaska, chiefly by Swedes who have settled there for the purpose, and who are described as the finest race of settlers anywhere to be met with. The sea lion, again, huge and fierce-looking, but harmless enough, is still to be met with about the Behring Sea; but his skin is only good for leather, and not for fur.

Yet the fur seals seem in their original habitat to hail from the shores of the Antarctic seas, and they have confined their subsequent wanderings to the Pacific and its coasts, with the exception of the Falkland Isles, where they are still

found, and where an enterprising government might find a seal preserve which would probably eclipse that of the Pribilof Isles. There is also a colony of them on the Crozet Isle in the Indian Ocean. But the relative importance of the several sources of supply may be judged of from the statistics of the average production of sealskins, which is estimated at a total of a hundred and thirty-one thousand. Of these a hundred thousand are the ordinary supply from the Pribilof Isles, with twenty-five thousand from other parts of the Behring Sea, and from the estuary of the Copper River, Crozet Isle supplies a thousand or so and the new Shetland and Falkland Isles make up the rest of the tale. All these skins, it may be noted, excepting a few that are shipped direct to China, are sent to London for sale, as well as to be dressed and prepared, as they are only roughly salted at the place of origin.

As we hear sometimes of the seal fisheries off the coast of Newfoundland, it may be as well to note that the hair seal is the object of pursuit, and that it is chiefly valuable for the oil it furnishes, which is of excellent quality and fetches a high price. The oil of the fur seal, on the other hand, is worth very little.

When the breeding season is over, the seals themselves gradually disperse, seeking probably warmer latitudes for the coming winter; for the fur seal does not like a very severe temperature any more than a very mild one. With the departure of the seals all the life, such as it is, of the Behring Sea comes to an end. Yet dreary as is the outlook on its coasts, there is still grand and terrible scenery to be found on the southern coast of Alaska. Enormous glaciers are forcing their way to the sea, covered with huge moraines of stones, which have themselves formed the basis of considerable pine forests, which flourish thus between a freezing sky and soil of ice. These great glaciers descend from huge valleys and rifts quarried from the flanks of mighty mountains. The chief of these, Mount Elias, rises to a height of nearly twenty thousand feet, thus forming the highest summit of the northern continent of America. The Americans, with their usual good luck, seem to have secured this Transatlantic monarch of mountains, although it is confessedly a near thing, and Greater Britain might make a plausible claim for a side of it. But we are not

likely to quarrel seriously about either mountain peak or Arctic sea, the interests of which are but of an insignificant nature compared with the importance of keeping a good understanding between the two great nations of the English-speaking race.

WRITING AND WRITING-MASTERS.

WHO invented the art of writing? Of course we shall have to go back to the ancient Egyptians, the Chinese, or even further back for the origin of picture-writing; but this was expressive of ideas rather than of sounds. The old Phœnicians are believed to have been the first to use a syllabic form of ideographic writing, which was the germ of an alphabet. The Egyptians improved upon it with their phonetic alphabet, which denoted both syllabic and alphabetical sounds by means of objects; thus, "Ahom" being an eagle, the figure of an eagle stood for the letter A, and so on. This is what may be called an ideographic alphabet, and it seems to have been in use as long ago as 700 B.C.

It is beyond our purpose to trace the history of the growth of penmanship from these ancient hieroglyphs to the fluent forms of the modern master of calligraphy, and the rapid figures of the swift phonographer; but it is worth while giving a little attention to the development of handwriting. At first men wrote from right to left, as Orientals still do. The Pelagic, or original Greek, alphabet was also written in this way, and afterwards back and forward, from right to left and left to right, like the furrows in a ploughed field. But there are examples of left to right writing as old as the seventh century B.C.

Without attempting to trace here the history of the alphabet, it is sufficient for our purpose to assume that all the alphabets we know have come through various channels from the old Phœnicians, each nation in succession using the letters it wanted, and dropping the rest. This is worth noting, because the old Phœnicians were also the founders of commerce. Truly they have left us a magnificent legacy in return for the tin they came to extract from Cornish mines, centuries upon centuries ago! We got it, however, through the Romans, for the Anglo-Saxon alphabet was taken from the Latin. The now predominant Roman alphabet is, of course, from the Latin, but not direct, as

it suffered some modification in passing through the Normans.

Now, why have the Roman characters been adopted for what we may call the cosmopolitan alphabet of modern times, in preference to the Greek characters? For two reasons. First, because Latin was the language of the educated classes of all nations during the Middle Ages; and second, and probably chiefly, because the Roman characters are much more adapted for rapid writing than the severe, if elegant, forms of the Greek alphabet. The Greek characters will not flow into each other with the smoothness and rapidity of the Roman forms, as, alas! every schoolboy knows.

It is common to associate early penmanship with the monks—that is to say, with the literate members of society; but an examination of the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts of the ninth century reveals the fact that even then penmanship must have been studied as a separate art. Some of them have evidently been beautifully inscribed by mere copyists. The writing-master in this country must be thus ten centuries old. At first he taught the “running hand” Saxon, which was a modification for more facile movement of the “set Saxon”; but the Norman Invasion changed the character of our penmanship, and prevented us from having a system of our own to be as great a vexation to the rest of the world as the German caligraphy is even unto this day.

There is not much difficulty in tracing modern “round hand” to the old Roman letters in a more free-running form, and the birth of the modern “running hand” may reasonably be associated with the invention of italics, which was the work of one Aldus Manutius about the year 1500.

There must have been a long and painstaking cultivation of the art of penmanship during the seventeenth century—although a few only of the names of the masters have been preserved to us—for the perfection of style attained by our own admirable Cocker, whose undoubted talents as a calligraphist are obscured by his greater renown as an arithmetician, must have been the result of successive generations of cultivation. One of the earliest masters of whom examples have been preserved was L. Materot, an Italian, resident at the Papal Court at Avignon about 1604. His style was clear and flexible although disposed to “curliness”

in the terminals, and it was partially adopted by Cocker in some of his examples a century later. Contemporary with Materot, or nearly so, were Barbedor, of Paris, who devoted himself to developing a commercial hand, very much like that now in use, if a little more stiff; Velde, a Dutchman, who greatly improved the German hand; and Ambroise Perlingh, another Dutchman, who gave greater ease and expedition to the round hand.

It was from Barbedor and Perlingh that the two famous English masters, Snell and Clark, derived their inspiration for the alteration of the English round and running hands, while another English master, Chambers, was more directly influenced by Velde. About the middle of the last century, one Joseph Champion was the leading expert in handwriting in England, and in a book of examples which he published in 1749, he instances Materot, Barbedor, Velde, and Perlingh as the four greatest original foreign masters of the art.

Edward Cocker was not long behind them. He was born in 1630, and was already an eminent teacher of penmanship when he published his “Penna Volans” in 1660. His fame as an arithmetician has been gained since his death, but it became so great that “according to Cocker” is a familiar household phrase, although the present generation may not know its origin.

“Cocker’s Vulgar Arithmetick” was published in 1678, and ran through fifty editions in seventy years. It was printed from a manuscript said to have been found among Cocker’s papers after his death, and he got none of the profits of its phenomenal success. Cocker had always refused to publish this work during his lifetime, and it is extremely doubtful if the famous preface with which John Hawkins, the editor, sent it forth to the world, was really written by Cocker, whose name was freely used towards the end of last century in palming off a number of works—dictionaries and school-books—with which he certainly had nothing to do. Indeed, it is even doubtful if Cocker was really the author of the famous “Arithmetick” published in his name in 1678. He says himself, in “Penna Volans,” published about 1660, that he had published a work called “The Complete Arithmetician,” and in “Penna Volans” he sets forth certain rules of arithmetic; but it is by no means certain that the work which made his

name a household word was really his. There is a book by him, now in the British Museum, called a "Tutor to Writing and Arithmetic"; but this is dated 1664—fourteen years earlier than the posthumous work which ran through so many editions, and which is generally ascribed to him.

It is as a penman, however, not as an arithmetician, that we are concerned with Edward Cocker just now. He was an artist and an engraver as well as a teacher, and he did much to beautify and improve the caligraphy of his generation. His style, no doubt, was stiff and ornate, but in many of the examples in "Penna Volans"—a very rare work—there is an artistic elegance not surpassed even by our present accomplished lithographic engravers of head-lines and ornamental lettering. He was not an original master—that is to say, he did not introduce any new style—but he gave form and character to the various styles then in use, and prepared the way for Clark and Hatton and other successors. Clark's penmanship, early in the last century, was certainly very beautiful and equal to that of any present-day copy-books, notwithstanding an exuberance of flourishes.

The angular "ladies' hand"—which the rising generation of the fair sex are abandoning for a more masculine upright or even "back" hand—became the fashion during the present century. It is graceful in appearance, and perhaps more easy to acquire than any other style. In Cocker's time the ladies wrote either an oval or a round hand, but in one of his works, called "Mulum in Parvo; or, the Pen's Gallantry," he gives an example of the angular hand which long afterwards became so popular.

There is a curious "advertisement" appended to this work of Cocker's, supposed to be his last, which is worth repeating:

"The Author of this Book being desirous to advance the Art, and do good in his generation, with the Abilities which God hath given him, undertakes to teach those who cannot write (if they be of competent age and capacity) to write any Hand in this Book compleatly in three weeks. He also fits Youths for Trades with Writing and Arithmetick in a moneths time. He undertakes also to teach any one that can work the Rule of Three in whole Numbers, fully to understand and use the whole doctrine of Fractions in a week. He likewise teaches any one (so qualified as aforesayd) all the Rules and Reasons of

Decimall Arithmetick in two days. Those who have their Children or Friends taught the best Hands and Arithmetick by the week or quarterly, may have them carefully and conscionably instructed, without so great an expense of their precious time as other Masters for their own profit would put them to. And for more conveniency they may board at the Author's House. Such as are or would be Teachers of this Art, may by him be enabled to make all flourishing Text Letters exactly. Also to write the large Church Text, and the great Italick Hand wholly and fully in one day, as well as any man in the World can write them. The Author also instructs (those that desire to be instructed therein) in the best manner of Writing and Enditing of Letters on all occasions. This and all he professes he faithfully performs for a reasonable consideration. The Title will inform you where he keeps Schoole."

This is a large order—so large, indeed, that although they be made by Cocker, they do not seem to be quite "according to Cocker." To teach "the large Church Text and the Great Italick Hand" in one day is a larger promise than that of modern proficients to teach the most elegant caligraphy in twelve lessons.

We have seen that caligraphy was well established as an art in the early part of the seventeenth century, since Cocker, as a notable practitioner, lived between 1631 and 1677. One hundred years before Cocker's birth, writing was not a very common accomplishment even in the upper classes. Miss Wood, in her searches after "Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies"—published 1846—came to the conclusion that the first English ladies who knew how to write were the daughters of John of Gaunt; but she records that, in 1534, a Miss Bassett, daughter of Sir John Bassett, was unable even to sign her name. This authority states that the first English letter known to have been written by a lady is dated 1441.

A later writer than Cocker on penmanship was Massey, who, in 1763, published a book called "The Origin and Progress of Letters," in which he gave the biographies of a number of "English Penmen," to wit, writing-masters. He laid down the characteristics of the different schools of writing, and he told the story of the great controversy between the two famous masters, Shelley and Snell. Shelley was the author of a system he called "Natural Writing," concerning which he published a

book; and Snell had another system, which he demonstrated in a book of "Standard Rules." Shelley was all for sprigs and ornaments, which Snell rejected. Snell, in turn, was attacked by Clark—another great master already named—and the controversy was prolonged and bitter.

In the reign of Queen Elizabeth there was an even more fierce contest between two renowned masters—Peter Bales and David Johnson. It is of Peter Bales that Holinshed records a curious example of microscopic writing. Within the compass of a silver penny he wrote as much matter as, in ordinary handwriting, would fill several pages. Bales mounted this manuscript in a ring of gold, covered with crystal, and presented it to Queen Elizabeth, along with a powerful microscope to enable her to read it. The Queen is said to have been greatly delighted with this calligraphic ring.

Johnson had been a pupil of Bales; but he became arrogant, and he challenged the master to a competition of penmanship. Bales replied by offering to compete for a pen of gold of the value of twenty pounds, in all kinds of hands—best, straightest, fastest; a full, a mean, a small, with line and without line; a slow set hand, a mean facile hand, a fast running hand; and also to "write truest and speediest, most secretary-like and clerk-like, from a man's mouth reading or pronouncing either English or Latin."

The trial took place before five judges. One competition gained the award on some points, the other on others; but Bales had the majority, and obtained the prize. Wherefore he adopted a golden pen as his professional sign, and had it emblazoned over his door. But the controversy endured long after the competition, and was neither pleasant nor dignified.

Another great competition between writing-masters occurred in the reign of Queen Anne, the competitors being named German and More. The prize in this case also was to be a golden pen, and it was decided in a curious way. The judge was unable to say that either handwriting was better than the other, and was about to dismiss the case, when he chanced to notice that German had omitted to dot one of his i's. The prize was therefore awarded to More, who is notable, further, as the author of a rare book called "Essay on the Invention of Writing."

In the British Museum is a copy of Macklin's Bible, the pages of which are

profusely embellished with pen-and-ink decorations. This is the work of a writing-master called Tomkins, who had a profound belief that penmanship was one of the fine arts, and who bequeathed this specimen of his skill to the nation.

A once popular phrase was "To write like an angel," which Isaac Disraeli thus explains. Angelo Vergecio was a learned Greek, who emigrated to Italy, and afterwards to France, in the reign of Francis the First. His beautiful calligraphy was the admiration of the learned of his time, and the King had a fount cast, modelled by his writing. Henry Stephens, the English scholar, learned to write Greek from Angelo, and wrote it so beautifully that he perpetuated the name of his teacher, and "to write like Angelo" became the popular phrase "to write like an angel."

We are all in too great a hurry nowadays to write like angels; but any one who has studied the specimens of school work displayed at recent industrial and educational exhibitions must feel that the art of penmanship is still being industriously cultivated, and that, on the whole, the standard of excellence is higher in this than in the past generation.

MY TENANTS AT THE DOWER HOUSE.

A STORY IN FIVE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER IV.

I DON'T remember anything more of the dance, or how I got home; but I do remember dragging my favourite arm-chair to the window, from whence I could look out up to the skies and on to the dark wood, behind which my Mollie was, perhaps, peacefully sleeping.

I tried to think the whole thing clearly out. Mollie was engaged to Dick; that was the matter in hand. I resolutely shut my heart to my own grief and disappointment; there would be plenty of hours, and days, and years, too, perhaps, when they might work their will. But to-night I must think of something else. Mollie's happiness was at stake. It was the remembrance of that which gave me strength to put self aside.

The more I thought of it the less I liked it. Why had I not gone to her mother the moment I heard that story? I tried to remember the very words James's son had used. There might be nothing in it; it

might be just a young man's carelessness magnified into a serious offence. I was always prejudiced against Dick. But even as I made the admission, and determined to be impartial, my distrust swept back upon me.

There was nothing to gain by his loving Mollie, neither wealth nor position, or I think I should have doubted his very love. He must be fond of her, then, in his own selfish fashion. Would her goodness keep him straight? Would she pull him up to her level, or would she sink to his? I could not imagine Mollie lowered by one hair's breadth, neither could I imagine Dick very greatly elevated.

I could understand so well how it came about. We must have been blind, all of us, to suspect nothing. Dick required some one to make his way smooth for him, and my darling was offering herself a willing sacrifice on the shrine of his selfishness.

Dick had, of course, displayed his usual astuteness. He had appealed to that motherly feeling, to that instinct of pity for the lonely and needy, which Mollie always possessed in a marked degree. What did she know of the world, of men and their ways? He had need of her, and all he did was right in her eyes; but above all he needed her. Mollie would always love most where she could give most. She wanted to be protected; but she would protect too.

I sat, with a pipe which was always being lighted and always going out, until the dawn faded into broad daylight, and the birds began to hop about and twitter to one another from branch to branch. I pushed open the window and looked out; the earth smelt fresh and cool, while I was heavy with much thinking and many fruitless resolutions. At length I made up my mind; I hardly hoped that much good would come of it, yet it was all I could do. I wrote and asked Dick to come over and see me, and closed my note with a hint that it was on a matter of importance.

He came willingly enough; and as he was shown into the dim old room, I was fain to confess that he was an exceedingly handsome man.

"Good morning," he said, as easily as ever. "It is a good thing your man was not a second later; I was just off for an hour or two with Johnson."

The small amount of friendship which lay between us never prevented his potting away at my birds when he was at home.

Just at present, of course, birds were out of the question.

"Rabbits?" I asked, to gain a little time. "There's nothing else, confound it."

He glanced round the room, and on perceiving my easy-chair, pulled it forward and seated himself there.

I told the story just as I had heard it. During the process he looked at me, first with a faint expression of surprise, and then with growing amusement on his face.

"Well?" he remarked, in a perfectly unmoved tone, when I finished; and then he waited for me to proceed, I suppose.

But I found that I had nothing more to say; I told him hoping that he would deny it, would excuse himself, would perhaps promise amendment, or do something. Instead, there he sat, looking at me with an air of benevolent amusement; while he quietly puffed away at a cigar, one leg crossed over his knee, and with his hand occasionally smoothing down a very well-fitting gaiter.

"Have you nothing to say?" I asked, sharply.

He patted out an infinitesimally small crease, put the cigar between his lips, and at last raised his eyes to my face.

"What should I say?" he said, and shrugged his shoulders. If only he had been angry, offended, penitent—anything but supremely indifferent!

"Do you think this is a nice story for Mollie to hear?" I demanded, roused from the judicial calm in which I had been so careful to envelope myself.

Once more he smiled at me indulgently.

"Who is to tell her?" he enquired.

"You admit that it is true?" I asked, hotly; "you don't deny it?"

"I do nothing either way," he answered, still smiling. "It pleased you to make the statement; it pleased me to listen to it. I suppose you have an idea that you are doing something for Mollie's sake? It is curious, if you think of it, but if people are ambitious to raise a dust, it is never out of their own malice or uncharitableness, but always for the benefit of somebody else."

The cigar required attention. He stretched out his hand for my match-box. I gave it to him passively.

"Thanks," he murmured, as he struck a light.

I was literally dumbfounded. I suppose I had hoped to send him away penitent and humbled. On the contrary, the tables

were turned—he was the accuser, I the accused.

"Yes," he went on, when he was quite reassured about the cigar, "I grant you that you were thinking of Mollie. You always have liked her; no," correcting himself, while his eyes never left my face, "loved her, I should say. I saw it all years ago, when first you did me the honour to dislike me. Later, I thought it out. You had these advantages," sweeping his shapely hand round the room. "I had no money, no particular prospect of ever being rich, and I loved her. You loved her also. So far the trump card was in your hands, but you—here comes the critical point, you perceive—were old, old enough to be her father, and I was young. It was all very nice for December, but for May? I determined to put the question to her, not exactly in those terms, as you can imagine, and she answered me, again not quite under those headings, but every bit as effectively. See?" he concluded.

I wondered at the time if he had any idea of the pain he was inflicting. I hardly thought so; but I know better now.

"Do you think that your youth will condone your sins in Mollie's eyes?" I asked, vehemently.

"Again let me remind you," he began, "that, provided I admitted your—charges, shall we call them; they really are a little difficult to define—which I don't: I neither admit them nor deny them—she will never know. Of course," answering, as it were, the thought in my mind, "you might tell her, or you might try to make mischief between us and the mater. I should not advise you to try; I really," with the air of one who is giving most disinterested advice, "should not. Mollie is a loyal little soul, but she possesses the Monsons' temper, and it can blaze. You don't want to play the part of a match, do you? Besides," and the words fell very quietly from him, "it might be put down to something less disinterested."

"What!" I almost shouted.

His lips parted and showed the row of slightly pointed white teeth; they looked cruel.

"I did not press the point," he answered, as he knocked the ash from off the tip of his cigar, and settled his head more comfortably among the cushions, "but my"—I wonder if I gave him the satisfaction of seeing me wince as he pro-

nounced that word—"Mollie was very distraught after her interview with you under the trees last night; and Mollie is as soft-hearted as a baby."

I sprang from my chair. I knew I was beaten, foiled, checkmated. I could do nothing; my hands and my tongue were tied. Dick rose at the same time, that is to say, he very deliberately drew himself out of the arm-chair.

"I must be going," he said, with a little accent of regret. We might have been the best of friends. "Mollie promised to be ready at twelve. Thanks for your interest. I think, but of course I may be wrong, that it would hardly do to promise Mollie's as well."

I longed to do something; to bid him never darken my doors again; to strike him even; but Mollie belonged to him.

Mollie, Mollie! How could you?

There is no misery like the misery of impotence to help those we love. In that hour, and in the long dreary days which were to follow, I drained that cup to the uttermost.

I had not moved Dick one whit; his serenity was never in the least ruffled. He had simply enjoyed the encounter, and his accuser had been worsted. The whip was in his hand, and he laid it on unmercifully.

Whichever way I turned I was fettered. I might have carried my tale to Mrs. Monson, but what good would that do? Bitter as Mollie's anger would have been to bear, I would have braved it had there been the smallest chance of success. But there was none; I knew Mollie too well to dream of such a thing.

Percy and I talked it over. He was less dazzled by Dick than the others.

"We might put it before her," he said, thoughtfully, "but there is only our word against his, and we know whom Mollie would believe. Of course," with the steady devotion which never failed, "I like her the better for its being so. Mollie is true to the core. Then, you know, it's only suspicion; we can't prove it. Your nephew's account points to Dick; but Mollie won't require him to remind her that suspicion is not evidence. Dick's a sharp fellow for all his lazy ways, and there is no getting at him."

Six months later, when Dick, with characteristic coolness, gave my name as a reference, I wrote to say that if ability and prudence counted for anything, Mr. Chalford was eminently fitted for the

post of secretary to the Coliseum Club. He was honest for anything I knew, and he certainly had the wisdom of the serpent, though I had my doubts as to the dove-like attributes.

It was the last nail in the coffin of my hopes; but oh! Mollie, if you were only happy!

They were married three months later.

I can see her in the prescribed white garments, but with a smile on her lips and a light in her eyes, and if ever absolute trust was written on a human face it was on hers when she shyly glanced at Dick.

He came forward after the ceremony and held out his hand.

"Won't you wish us happiness?" he asked.

I looked into his face; it was as open as ever a face could be, smiling, contented, a little triumphant, perhaps, but one could forgive that in a man who had just married Mollie.

"I do," I answered; and indeed I did.

Mollie looked at me with pleased eyes, and the soft colour came into her cheeks. I saw Dick's glance wander from her to me, then back again.

"You may kiss her to-day if you like," he said, quietly. "See how generous your husband is, Mollie."

I turned my head away. Just for one moment the fierce temptation nearly overcame me. To take one kiss from those lips! It would only be taking advantage of his permission, and I was such an old friend. But could I kiss her as her brother might do? She, another man's wife. Mollie's great eyes brought me back to my senses.

"This must be enough for me," I faltered, and raised her hand to my lips.

Dick watched me; a smile played around his mouth; the lips parted, and showed the pointed teeth.

Then I understood how hollow the truce was!

CHAPTER V.

A FEW months after Mollie's marriage Mrs. Monson died suddenly. One evening, just when the daylight was fading, and the low grey tints of twilight were drawing in, quietly and without warning the summons came to her.

We laid her to rest under the shadow of the old church, where she had worshipped so often. We, I say, for they belonged to

me and I to them, only Mollie was parted from us.

She came down for the funeral. To my anxious eyes she was thin and pale; but Percy, in whom I confided my fears, said that he thought it was only natural.

Dick did not went up. Mollie said that he was kept in town by unavoidable business, but that he would follow by the first train on the morning of the funeral. A telegram came instead—more important business, I suppose.

Mollie looked grieved; but less surprised than might have been expected.

After that I went for a long trip—to India and back. Penfields was unbearable; it seemed to be peopled with the ghosts of past happiness; besides, I did nothing but brood there. I am only a poor creature after all. Sorrow braces some people; but not me. So I tried a change, something to put Mollie's eyes out of my mind, and ease my heart of its pain, and by so doing I laid up for myself the unending burden of regret. Heaven knows I might not have been able to do anything if I had been near; but perhaps—I cannot tell.

I saw sights and shows, and temples and monuments; but I was heartily glad when I landed at Southampton again. I went straight off to Penfields, purposing at the first decent excuse to run up to town and look at Mollie.

I had a few bits of old brass ware, a length or two of embroidery for her, and several other trifles like that. Dick was of an artistic turn of mind, and would not at all object to his wife receiving such gifts.

Somers, the agent, came to me the night I returned home, and when the accounts had been verified and the reports received, he asked me whether I wished for another tenant for the Dower House.

"Let it stand over a bit," I said; "Mrs. Chalford might like to see it again."

I thought he looked at me oddly; but I said nothing; one cannot quite take a man to task for what may be, after all, only a fancy of one's own.

Next morning a telegram was brought to me as I was lingering over my breakfast.

"Percy coming down," I thought, "or Jack landed from Gib', or the boys want something." I put it down in my own mind to Percy; he was rather given to "sixpennyworth's," as he called them.

I tore it open.

For a minute or two the words on the pink paper danced and whirled before my eyes. Then I steadied myself. It was no time for weakness; it was the time for action.

Mollie had need of me. The telegram said:

"Come to me without fail. An accident."
"MOLLIE."

Where?—twice I looked to make certain—where? Mollie in an hospital. What was Mollie doing in an hospital? Shall I ever forget that journey and those hours of suspense? My mind worked incessantly. First one hideous picture came before me, then another; but all of them, I think, were less hideous than the reality. I told the cabman that I would give him double fare if he drove like the wind. Oh, that long procession of streets; the turning round corners; down by-ways; shouted at by a policeman; almost overturned by an omnibus!

We were there at last. I stumbled up the steps, the telegram in my hand, and then some one took me along the great paved passages into a ward. I saw that there were beds on either side. I knew that they were occupied; but where was Mollie? A nurse came towards me.

"Is she very ill?" I gasped, as I put the telegram into her hand. "How did it happen? What is it?"

She looked at me.

"You are her—?"

She paused.

"I am her guardian," I explained; for Mrs. Monson had made me co-executor with Jack and Percy.

"Her husband ought to be here," she went on; and I think she wanted to prepare me for what was to come.

"Why don't you send for him?" I asked, impatiently.

"We don't know where he is."

This information hardly struck me at the moment as at all strange. I remembered that my questions were unanswered. I repeated them:

"What is it?" I asked. Is she much hurt?"

"Yes; a great deal," the nurse replied, gravely.

"What is it?" I asked. "Get her over it as quickly as you can. Spare nothing. It is not a question of money."

"Money can do nothing," she answered, softly.

"Nothing!" I echoed; "nothing?"

"I fear not."

What did she mean? Not that; surely, not that. I drove the thought away.

"It is not true!" I almost shouted.

The nurse drew me into a little sitting-room.

"Hush!" she said, and waited.

Slowly the whole meaning of the sentence came to me. Mollie was to die; Mollie, who was so young, and beautiful, and good. I felt that I must make certain, must have the words clearly before me, that there might be no mistake.

"She is dying!" I asked, in a voice so perfectly tuneless that I even noticed it myself.

"Yes," she answered.

"How long?"

"At the most it is only a question of hours."

I stared at her. There was no mistake. Mechanically I walked to the window and looked out. A girl was selling violets outside; the autumn sunshine was slanting across the road. Mollie loved violets. Mollie— The meaning of it all fell clear on my brain. I turned quickly.

"Take me to her," I urged. I must not lose one precious moment. Heaven only knew how few might be left to us.

Silently the nurse opened the door, and I followed her to where, at the far corner, a bed stood screened off from the rest. She drew back the curtain, and I entered. Yes, it was Mollie—Mollie, with her dear grey eyes.

"Mollie!" I cried, and knelt beside her, the exceeding bitterness of death in my heart. "Mollie!"

The shadows were hovering around her; there was that look on her face which can only mean one thing.

"Mollie, speak to me!" I implored.

The dear lips parted, but no sound came to me. She tried to stretch out her hand. I laid mine on hers. Slowly it travelled back and touched something soft by her side.

"For my sake," she said, and it seemed to me that the effort exhausted the little remnant of her strength. She lay back, but her eyes followed me anxiously. What did she want?

My hand still rested on the warm, soft bundle. It stirred; it was Mollie's baby. Then I understood. I thank Heaven humbly that I did. I lifted it up and took it into my arms.

"Mollie," I said, "it shall never want for a protector as long as I live. Is that it?"

Her eyes told me that it was. I laid the baby back again in its mother's arms. I saw the wonderful love light up the poor wan face; then her head drooped a little, the eyes closed, and when Mollie opens them it will be in Heaven.

What came next?

There is a grief for which there are no words; but little Mollie is with me. I bought her. It is an ugly word, but it is true. That was why Keldon Pines was sold. James was very angry about it, and said that I was robbing his boy; but it was an outlying farm that Rex had left to me, a big one certainly, but it had nothing to do with the property.

The money went to Dick.

We found him, Percy and I, the day after my darling's death, at Plumpton Races, just as smiling and as pleasant as usual; but there was a nasty look in his eyes. He heard the news with a most decorous show of grief.

"My poor Mollie!" he murmured. "She was just a little difficult to live with. I think you had all spoilt her. She could not quite make up her mind that the world would turn round just the same whether she approved of it or not. Poor little Mollie!" He gave me a sharp look from under those long fringed lashes. "We miss the very crossness of those we love, you know."

I did not say anything. I had learned at last that words were useless. Besides, I had my game to play, and, as it fell out, Fate aided me.

For once Dick's astuteness had failed him. He had backed a certain horse heavily on the strength of certain information, about the source of which the less said the better, and his information turned out to be worthless. The biter was bitten. That was my chance.

Dick signed a paper, which I took good care should be as binding as the law could make it, in which he waived for all time his claims to little Mollie, and I sold Keldon Pines. I don't think he would have let go his hold on the child, which he might always have used as a means of squeezing money out of us, had his affairs not been desperate. The confederates had quarrelled among themselves, and Dick was the only one who had the shadow of a name or position to lose. He trusted to money to hush them, and next time he would manage better. As it was, he left the lawyer's

office with an expression of chastened regret.

"The sight of the child, which has cost me her dear mother's life, is more than I can bear," he said.

What those months were to my Mollie, and how she came to be in the street, and to be knocked down by a passing hansom, I shall never know.

Perhaps that exceedingly smart young woman who disappeared so swiftly when I accosted Dick on the racecourse, and Mollie's worn face, explain a good deal.

Little Mollie and I live very quietly at Penfields. I have saved quite a nice little sum for her, and Percy is to be depended upon for the rest.

THE THIRTEENTH BRYDAIN.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "Catherine Maudmont's Bayden," "Benefit o' Clergy," "Mr. Wingrove's Ways," "The Vicar's Aunt," "Dick's Wife," etc.

CHAPTER XV.

NINE months had come and gone, and it was spring again, and almost a year since Brydain's first arrival in London. Though it was only the first week of April, it was a very warm day; one of those days that seem to come now and then into the midst of sleet, late frosts, and lingering east wind, as if to remind us of what April might be, and could be, were it inclined to show its best characteristics. The sun shone, it is true, through a haze; but it was that faintly coloured haze which is an essential characteristic of London sunlight, and which, to those accustomed to it, is suggestive, through association, of heat. The suggestions were amply verified; the haze deprived the rays of the sun of none of their power, and at five o'clock they were still beating down everywhere with a strength to which the slowly lengthening shadows had brought but little diminution as yet. It was very hot, indeed, inside the Steinway Hall. The ventilators were opened, and the windows shaded, but in spite of this the current of air that rushed along the passages and into the concert-room every time the door swung to and fro was very welcome. A morning concert had been going on for two hours, and now a little stir had begun in the audience, caused by the fact that people were one by one beginning to

leave. One of the first groups to move consisted of three people who had been sitting in the second row of the stalls. These three people were Mrs. Kingston, Rachel, and Tiny. They moved noiselessly along the narrow passage towards the door, and as it swung to behind them a little exclamation of surprise broke from Tiny.

"Why, mother!" she exclaimed, "isn't that Etrenne Farrant in front of us?" Two people who had come out just before them were moving slowly along the passage, a step or two in advance, and as though she had heard Tiny's voice, Etrenne Farrant—for the younger figure of the two in front was indeed hers—turned quickly. Tiny moved towards her impulsively. "I thought you were still in Africa!" she cried. "Algiers is in Africa, isn't it?" she added, in a breathless little parenthesis.

Etrenne Farrant and her mother had left London as soon as the latter was sufficiently recovered from the attack of illness which had caused the postponement of the dinner party, and had not returned to it in the autumn. The aforesaid illness had proved much more lasting in its effects than had been supposed likely; and they had, in consequence, arranged to spend the winter in Algiers, for Mrs. Farrant's sake. Tiny had learned these facts just before Christmas from a mutual friend.

"I hope Mrs. Farrant is really recovered?" said Mrs. Kingston, as Etrenne Farrant approached her to shake hands before she answered Tiny's greeting.

"I hope so, thank you," was the answer. "But she is so very anxious to demonstrate the fact that I mistrust her enthusiasm; and I have refused to let her try her strength by going about as yet."

"When did you get back?" said Tiny, still eager to have her curiosity satisfied.

"On Thursday," Etrenne Farrant said. "As this is only Saturday, you cannot accuse me of being remiss! Mrs. Wilmot wanted some one to come with her to-day, and I was only too glad to take the opportunity of reappearing. May I introduce my friend, Mrs. Wilmot? Mrs. Wilmot—Mrs. Kingston," she said, breaking off and addressing Mrs. Kingston.

Her companion, a pleasant-looking woman of about thirty, acknowledged the introduction, and after a polite word or two had been exchanged, Etrenne Farrant spoke again.

"I was so surprised," she said, "to see Mr. Brydain's name in the programme. I had no idea that we should have the pleasure of hearing him. In fact, I did not know that he was singing yet."

"This has been his first appearance!" said Mrs. Kingston and Rachel simultaneously.

"And don't you think he was good?" interpolated Tiny, quickly.

"Indeed, I thought—we both thought," turning to Mrs. Wilmot, "that Mr. Brydain's singing was excellent. He well deserved the applause he got."

"I am so glad it went all right," said Tiny. "I got hot all over when he began, for fear he should break down."

"I should like to congratulate him," Etrenne Farrant responded.

"He will be here directly; we are waiting for him," said Rachel. Almost before her words were spoken, Tiny made an excited addition to them: "Here he is! Here is Keith, mother!" she said.

The door that communicated with the artists' room had opened as Rachel spoke, and Keith Brydain himself came rapidly towards the group in the passage. There was a flush on his face, his eyes were very bright indeed, and his tall figure looked better than ever in the long, correct frock-coat he wore.

As he approached them, the unusual light in his eyes deepened into a smile—a smile which seemed to gather up and form the culminating point of all the excitement and pleasure, which showed itself in every line of his expressive, sensitive face.

"Oh, Keith, we liked it so!" cried Tiny, impulsively, before any one else could speak.

"I'm very glad!" he said. The words were simple enough; but the excitement that was in his face was present also in his voice, and made the few words into an expression of keen delight.

"My dear Keith," said Mrs. Kingston, with her usual placidity changed into something which, for her, was great warmth of manner, "it was most excellent! You must be thankful it is over," she added.

Etrenne Farrant had stood just a little in the background as Tiny and Mrs. Kingston spoke. She waited a moment longer while Rachel echoed her mother's words; and then she came forward.

"How do you do, Mr. Brydain?" she said. "I should like to congratulate you also, if I may!"

Brydain had not, in the excitement of

the moment, noticed Etrenne Farrant's presence hitherto. Now he looked round and took the hand she offered him simply enough.

"Thank you," he said; and his voice showed that his mind was more occupied with the congratulations than with the giver. "You are all very kind."

"I am delighted to have returned to England in time for your first appearance," she said, smiling as she spoke.

"Thank you," he said again. "You don't know how glad I am to have got through," he said, to the group in general. "It wasn't nice for the first few moments," he added, with a little laugh.

"I saw Mr. Lennard in the room," said Mrs. Kingston.

"Have you seen him? Did he say nice things to you?" asked Tiny, eagerly, before her mother could go on.

"He was very kind," said Brydain.

"You're so dreadfully ambiguous, Keith! What did he really say? I believe you are too modest to tell us, though."

"I think we had better let Keith have a little respite," said her mother, "and hear the details later on. You cannot come back with us, you said?" she added, to Brydain.

"No; thank you very much," he answered. "I must get back. Tredennis is coming up to see me."

"Mrs. Kingston," Etrenne Farrant said, as Tiny began a half laughing, half serious declaration to Brydain concerning the primary duty he owed to his relations on so great an occasion as the present, "will you forgive a very short invitation, and come to us on Monday afternoon? My mother is not entertaining yet; I will not let her. But she finds life rather dull under my restrictions, and she begged me to ask 'any friends I saw' to take pity on her. Mrs. Wilmot," turning to her, "and Mr. Reid, and Mr. Wood are coming, and my mother will be both pleased and grateful if you and Miss Kingston and Tiny will follow their example, and come, quite informally, to tea at half-past four. You will?" as Mrs. Kingston, after a moment's consultation as to engagements with Rachel, accepted; "that is very kind. Mr. Brydain," Etrenne Farrant went on, turning to where he stood laughingly defying Tiny's eloquence, "will you also come to tea with us on Monday afternoon? Mrs. Kingston is coming, and my mother would be very pleased to see you."

Brydain turned to her.

"Thank you," he said. "On Monday, did you say?"

"Yes; at half-past four," she answered.

"Thank you," he said again, simply. "I shall be delighted. Let me see for the carriages," he added, as Mrs. Kingston and Etrenne Farrant made a simultaneous movement as if to go.

Etrenne Farrant and Mrs. Wilmot were, however, walking, as they were going to make a call in a not very distant street; and Mrs. Wilmot's statement of this, and the farewells of the two occupied a few moments. "Monday!" Etrenne Farrant said, smilingly, as she shook hands. "You will not forget us, Mr. Brydain?" Ten minutes later, he had seen his aunt and cousins into their carriage, and had set out on his way home.

Brydain had spent a very quiet winter. The Kingstons went to France in August, as they had arranged; and they had repeatedly endeavoured to persuade Brydain to come with them, or at any rate to follow them and stay with them. But their persuasions were quite vain. Brydain steadily refused to leave his work. And it was only because Tredennis absolutely refused to start without him that he was persuaded to accompany the latter to a little village on the river, where Tredennis, who was an enthusiast about fishing, had this year taken up his summer quarters. He would only promise to stay for a fortnight, however; and the end of that time saw him, in spite of Tredennis's pleadings, representations, and, finally, threats, back in his rooms at work. Since that time he had scarcely given himself a single holiday except Sundays. Mr. Lennard had come back to town in the end of October, and after much loudly expressed disapprobation at Brydain's short holiday, had allowed him to resume his former hours of work, and had again begun to give him lessons. These had continued steadily and uninterruptedly throughout the winter.

The Kingstons had come back to town rather before Mr. Lennard, and Brydain had agreed to an arrangement propounded to him by Mrs. Kingston:

"It is useless to trust to your holidays for seeing anything of you, Keith," she had said; "they seem to me to be only a name. You will promise, to please me, to come and see us every alternate Sunday?"

This plan had been faithfully adhered

to by Brydain, who had in consequence earned Tiny's approval.

"You aren't quite such a hopeless hermit!" she said to him, one Sunday. "But it's our doing, not yours, mind."

He had also, on a chance hint from Mr. Lennard that his appearance in society would be possibly productive of good results, in his future, consented to go to one or two parties with the Kingstons in the course of the winter; but these had been very few.

Tredennis had returned promptly to his work in October, and of him Brydain had, of course, seen more than any one. The two men had grown increasingly attached to each other, and had spent an increasing amount of their available time together. So the winter months had slipped away, leaving for Brydain scarcely any appreciable mark of their passing, save the progress he made in his singing. This progress was very rapid; and Mr. Lennard, as soon as concerts began to be thought of in the spring, turned his attention, as he had intimated that he should do, towards discovering a fitting occasion for Brydain's first public appearance. This occasion had been found in a concert to be given in the first week of April by a Mr. Werner, a pianist, and an acquaintance of Mr. Lennard's, who, being still in the uphill part of his career, was more than willing to give Brydain a place in his programme when asked for it by Mr. Lennard, considering, sagely, that an obligation from such a man was a good investment.

To-day, the occasion long thought of and much dreaded by Brydain, had come and passed. He had sung the song chosen for him by Mr. Lennard with correctness and feeling. The unusual beauty of his voice had instantly attracted attention; the excellence of his technique had held it; and the two together had roused the audience to some degree of enthusiasm when the song was over.

Mr. Lennard had been asked by one or two critics who were present for information about "the new young man." Their questions had intimated a considerable interest in Brydain, and the interest was not unmixed with praise. Their interest Mr. Lennard had taken care to foster, and their impressions he had subsequently conveyed to Brydain. He had added thereto the few tersely expressed words of commendation from himself, which Brydain naturally cared

for most of all. The very terseness of them had shown Brydain, accustomed to his master's manner, their depth and reality; and when he came out into the passage to meet his aunt and cousins, Brydain was more excited and genuinely elated than he had ever been in his life before. The congratulations waiting him in the passage had been a great addition to his pleasure. Brydain had much wished to justify his hard work in the eyes of his relations; and he was also simply and almost boyishly anxious that they should approve of him.

He had taken Etrenne Farrant's congratulations simply as a part of this delightful whole. In the excitement of the moment, his meeting with her had stirred no associations; it had not even occurred to him to be surprised to see her. In the course of his winter's work, with which she had had no connection, the remembrance of the incidents of their first acquaintance, and the shock and struggle which had had her name for a ground-work, had become obliterated from his mind. He, when he recognised her in the passage of the Steinway Hall, recognised her simply as an acquaintance. He accepted her invitation in precisely the same indifferent mood—indifferent to and oblivious of any association with her.

All through the winter Tredennis had secretly and anxiously watched Brydain; watched for the first, or slightest re-appearance of what he looked upon as his superstitious weakness. To Tredennis's infinite satisfaction, he had watched in vain. Not another word had Brydain spoken on the subject; not a single fit of depression had overpowered him. And Tredennis congratulated himself, at first tentatively, then heartily, on having successfully enabled him to "get over" his folly.

Tredennis's keen sight, however, was not infallible. The real facts of the case were that the hard-working, nineteenth-century life Brydain led from day to day of that winter had put wholly into the background all his old-world life at Brydain, and with it all its associations, and fancies, and feelings. He was far too hard at work, far too anxious to be ready to sing in public in April, to have room for any visionary or unpractical ideas. All such were temporarily buried and banished. But—and this Tredennis could not know—their banishment was but temporary. The shadow that rested on Brydain's

life before had only gone backwards—driven back by the light of daily pressure and concentration on definite work. It had not faded away in that light.

At this moment, Brydain walked rapidly towards Upper Baker Street without one definite thought or feeling. He thought, vaguely, in his excitement that London was the most delightful place on earth, and all life in it only delightful too. He threw the little crossing-sweeper at the end of the street half-a-crown, to the boy's utter amazement, and then, having reached his own door, he let himself in and ran upstairs, to be greeted by Tredennis, who stood waiting for him in the doorway.

CHAPTER XVI.

"MR. BRYDAIN, let me introduce you to my mother. It is a somewhat long-delayed introduction, mother, is it not?"

Mrs. Farrant held out her hand to Brydain.

"The delay lies at my door, and I am very glad to end it," she said, cordially.

"I hope you are quite well again," Brydain said.

"Quite, thank you," was the answer; to which, however, Etrenne added, smiling:

"Nearly, mother, dear, is truer! Won't you sit down, Mr. Brydain?" Etrenne Farrant continued, motioning him to a chair near her mother.

It was Monday afternoon. Brydain, in the excitement which lasted throughout the rest of Saturday, had completely forgotten both Etrenne Farrant's invitation and his own acceptance of it, until, having gone to dine at Weymouth Street on Sunday night, he was reminded of it by Tiny. On the next day he had atoned, to himself, for his forgetfulness by setting out for Kensington in such good time as to reach the Farrants' house rather early, and to discover, a little to his confusion, that he was the first arrival.

The room in which he found himself was large, and furnished so completely in accord with the very latest artistic designs, as to make it, by that very correctness, a little stiff and conventional; but its colouring and draperies were all very pleasant to the eye, and the stiffness was in great measure dispelled by the spring flowers which were arranged in every possible corner, and made the air almost heavy with their sweetness.

Mrs. Farrant was a little woman of

about fifty-five, with a pleasant dark face which was still rather white and thin, from her illness, and a pleasant, perfectly finished manner.

She glanced keenly at Brydain as he sat down beside her. Mrs. Farrant had a way of forming her conclusions about people by a glance; and apparently, those she formed about Brydain were pleasant, for she greeted his first attempt at conversation with a cordial manner and smile. As Brydain prepared to sit down, Etrenne Farrant moved a step or two to resume the place on the sofa which had been hers when Brydain entered. She paused an instant on her way, and taking one or two daffodils from a vase, placed them carelessly in her waistband. Brydain happened to glance up as she did so, and on his eyes and his mind was suddenly and vividly impressed the picture that she made. It was a cloudy day, and she stood against the dull light from the window, her pretty dark head sharply outlined as she bent it over the flowers that made the single bright touch of colour on her grey frock. It was still before him, while she moved away, and he went on talking to Mrs. Farrant.

"The Kingstons are late," Etrenne Farrant said; "so is every one, in fact! Mr. Brydain, I suppose your aunt and cousins have not forgotten us?"

Brydain turned to her quickly. "I think not," he said, smilingly. "Tiny assured me yesterday that—"

He was interrupted. The door was opened at that instant, and Mrs. Kingston and Tiny were announced.

"You must be angels, for we were just talking of you," laughed Etrenne, as she echoed her mother's greetings. "Only you?" she added, interrogatively, to Tiny. "Your sister is coming too, I trust?"

"Rachel has a cold—an awful cold," Tiny said, as she settled herself on the sofa by Etrenne. "She is very painstaking and thorough about things, you know, and I always tell her she carries it into her colds."

"Did she catch it on Saturday?" said Etrenne. Then, scarcely waiting for Tiny's affirmative, she turned, as if suddenly impelled by the connection of thought, to Brydain, who, on Mrs. Kingston's entrance, had moved to a chair nearer the sofa: "I did not half congratulate you on Saturday," she said.

"On the contrary, you congratulated

me far more than I deserved!" he answered, quickly.

At that moment, Mrs. Kingston, from the opposite side of the room, appealed to Tiny for confirmation of a date, of which she was uncertain, and Tiny had to rise and establish herself temporarily by her mother and Mrs. Farrant. Brydain and Etrenne Farrant were thus practically left alone to talk to each other, and possibly the position told slightly on Brydain's imagination during the conversation that followed. Etrenne continued to talk of Saturday's concert and its details, always from the point of view of Brydain's song and his singing, on which she bestowed much admiration, expressing the same more by delicate inference than by direct compliment. It seemed to Brydain, as Etrenne Farrant talked, that not one single one, among all the congratulations and expressions of approval he had had, had been so sympathetic, so real, or so gratifying as those she was giving him now, in her pretty voice, and with her dark eyes soft with interest and enthusiasm. He was just beginning to talk to her about his hopes and his plans for the future, when a sudden slight commotion broke off his words and distracted Etrenne's attention. It was caused by the entrance of two young men—Mr. Reid and the second man of whom Etrenne Farrant had spoken, who appeared to be a friend of Mr. Reid's—a Mr. Wood. Etrenne turned to greet the two, as they left her mother.

"How do you do?" she said. "I thought you were going to follow Mrs. Wilmot's bad example! She has apparently quite forgotten us."

Then as Mr. Wood, a fair-haired, plain young man, was looking rather uncertain as to what course to pursue, Etrenne, with a word or two of easy conversation, took him and introduced him to Tiny, who welcomed him as she would have welcomed any young man who brought distraction from the polite and dreary conversation of her mother and Mrs. Farrant. Mr. Reid, meanwhile, sat down on the sofa, and began a rather formal conversation with Brydain. This was brief, as the topics of mutual interest to the two were speedily exhausted; and Mr. Reid, after an apparently vain search for more, rose with a look of relief at the break to move forward a chair for Etrenne. She thanked him with a smiling negative, and proceeded to establish herself behind

the tea equipage which had just been brought in by the servant.

"Mr. Reid," she said, "you may make up for being so late, if you like, by carrying all the cups for me. Come and be good, and try!"

Mr. Reid needed no second bidding. He was at the side of the tea-table almost before she had done speaking, and Brydain was left by himself. The fact that he was by himself, and for the moment nothing whatever was asked of him in the way of conversation, increased the keen interest with which he instinctively watched Etrenne Farrant. The process of pouring out tea is always, more or less, in the hands of a woman, a picturesque and graceful action, and Etrenne's own grace and charm intensified every movement and gesture that was involved. She handed the two first cups to Mr. Reid, and looked up at him meanwhile with a little smile which made her pretty face indescribably winning. Brydain, without the least definite reason, or any actual consciousness of what had impelled him, started up suddenly as he saw the smile, and, going up to her, offered to help Mr. Reid in his service. Etrenne accepted his offer with another smile. Brydain, when he set down the plate he had carried, determined, also unreasoningly and impulsively, that he must and would sit beside her and talk to her again. This, however, proved impossible; Mr. Reid had secured the only available place, and showed no intention of relinquishing it. Brydain had to retreat to a slightly isolated chair, and from thence to choose whether he would talk to Mrs. Farrant and his aunt, Tiny and Mr. Wood, or study Etrenne's expression as Mr. Reid talked to her. He chose none of these alternatives; he sat with his eyes in Etrenne's direction, it is true, and no look, nor word, nor smile of hers escaped him. But he was struggling, as he sat there, against a sudden and unreasonable desire to take Mr. Reid by the shoulder and turn him out of his chair. He could not understand himself. He ascribed his feeling, which grew stronger moment by moment, to a personal dislike to Mr. Reid; and he told himself that he had never, in all his life, so hated a man. Then he told himself that he was an unreasonable fool, and it was time he taught himself to be more tolerant of persons whose individuality might be different to his own. But this highly sensible argument did not weigh as it ought with him, and his feeling developed rapidly into a burning desire to put

an end to Mr. Reid's conversation with Etrenne Farrant at any cost.

He could not, however, think of any pretext on which he could even join in it. Suddenly, however, an inspiration came to him—an inspiration which, if it were of any practical use at all, was fraught with more than one result. The evening before, Mrs. Kingston had told him of her intention of giving a large musical At Home chiefly in his honour; and she had asked him to suggest an outline of arrangements for the music. He had thrown himself into the plan with the greatest interest; they had sketched a tentative programme, and as a change among songs and solos, he had suggested that they should get up a little operetta for three voices. The voices were soprano, alto, and tenor. The man's part, of course, he was to sing. For the soprano, Tiny had thought of a girl friend who was an excellent amateur vocalist; but for the alto, a little, very easy part, no one had been able to suggest a possible person, and the want had not been supplied when the subject was temporarily dismissed. Now Brydain suddenly remembered that Etrenne Farrant had said, in the course of the long-past evening they had spent at the opera, that she was very fond of every kind of part-singing. If she could sing this alto part, he would have an excuse for interrupting her conversation to ask her to do so; and if she consented, it would be very pleasant. Brydain never asked himself why it would be very pleasant; he scarcely knew that he was very anxious that she should consent. He only instantly and impulsively prepared to reduce his inspiration to action.

"Tiny," he said, going up to his cousin, "Tiny, does not Miss Farrant sing? Could not she be persuaded, do you think, to take that part in 'Fair Maids of June'?"

Tiny looked up at Brydain's face. It was eager and excited. She wondered if his excitement had anything to do with Etrenne Farrant. She had not been unimpressed by the unaccountable way in which he had received her laughing hint months before. She told herself that she had made two mistakes in interfering in Brydain's affairs; and she had fallen back on the consciousness that she did not understand her cousin. So she answered him simply now:

"Yes," she said; "I'm sure if she will, she can. I never thought of it yesterday. Ask her, Keith, do."

A moment later, Mr. Reid was considerably astonished and a little irritated. He became suddenly aware that Brydain had brought a chair beside Etrenne Farrant and himself, and was saying to her:

"I want to ask you a favour, Miss Farrant—a great favour."

She turned to him with a smile, and Brydain, watching the smile, felt an odd little thrill as he began to explain his case.

It took a good deal of persuasion, and some help from Tiny, to induce Etrenne to believe that she was capable of what was asked of her. But, once convinced of that, she consented readily, and when, a quarter of an hour later, Mrs. Kingston rose to go, Brydain was triumphant, and had undertaken to post to Etrenne Farrant that very evening the book of "Fair Maids of June," that she might look through her part.

NOTE.

The Terms to Subscribers having their Copies sent direct from the Office: Weekly Numbers, 10s. 10d. the Year, including postage; and Monthly Parts, 12s. 6d.

Post Office Orders should be made payable to ALBERT SKYMOUR, 12, St. Bride Street, Ludgate Circus, E.C.

The Right of Translating Articles from ALL THE YEAR ROUND is reserved by the Authors.